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SUBJECT: SHANGHAI HOUSING RIGHTS LAWYER ZHANG ENCHONG UPDATE

REF: A) SHANGHAI 75 AND PREVIOUS; B) SHANGHAI 19

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Beede, Political/Economic Section  
Chief, U.S. Consulate , Shanghai .  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) In a phone conversation on the evening of February 22, Shanghai Housing Rights Lawyer Zheng Enchong confirmed that he is currently under heavy surveillance and was beaten by thugs he believed to be plainclothes police. According to Zheng, he was beaten by two "policemen" on February 16 after he refused to sign a document. Currently, there are 10 "policemen" waiting outside his apartment building who are intent on preventing him from leaving the building. He attempted to leave once but was dragged back up the stairs and beaten by the "policemen".

¶2. (C) When asked what triggered the increase in surveillance and police harassment, Zheng said that the government did not want him to meet with journalists. He was on his way to meet with a New York Time journalist when he was beaten on February ¶16. He added that he has also written a letter to President Bush thanking him for his support of Protestants in China. He wanted to pass this letter on to the U.S. Consulate in Shanghai or to the U.S. Embassy in Beijing. If he is unable to give the letter to either the Consulate or Embassy, he would find a way to get the letter to Hong Kong and ask that the U.S. Consulate in Hong Kong pass the letter to President Bush.

¶3. (SBU) A February 26 New York Times article reported that associates close to Zheng believe that the police have increased their efforts to silence Zheng after he started advising residents who had organized protests against the Shanghai government's plans to extend the high-speed Maglev train. (See Ref. B) The article added that others believe that Zheng is being punished for speaking out on high-level corruption. Zheng reportedly has detailed information on Huang Ju, Jiang Zemin and other members of the "Shanghai Gang."

¶4. (C) Comment: It is unlikely that there is just one reason behind the government's efforts to silence Zheng. Since his released in June 2006, Zheng has been very outspoken in his criticism of the government and has also been quoted several times in the Western media. Shanghai has also witnessed large-scale protests by home owners against the local government's plans to extend the Maglev. In addition, the government could also be trying to clamp down on dissenting voices in the run-up to the National People's Congress in early March.

